Sakshi~s U-turn

The once Congress-affiliated media house now attacks the Congress party as well as Chandrababu Naidu -- a new strategy with wider political implications for the Congress party and YS Jagan Mohan in Andhra Pradesh. C.S.H.N. MURTHY presents his take on this development. Pix: Y S Jagan

Posted Monday, May 24 01:25:46, 2010

Off late the Sakshi newspaper and its only television channel, took a u-turn and began to don the role of Eenadu/ETV or Andhra Jyothi/ABN TV in exposing the corruption and inefficiency in the present Congress dispensation. The u-turn was quite dramatic and has upset many a Congressman both in the State and in New Delhi.

In fact, the Congress MP in the Rajya Sabha V. Hanumantha Rao went to the extent of asking YS Jagan Mohan to remove the emblem of Jagan~s father (YSR) on Sakshi TV and newspaper, as people no longer consider the paper/TV channel as that of the Congress. Another Lok Sabha MP, Madhu Yashki Goud, who is very active in the present Telangana movement, and Palvai Goverdhan Reddy, an MLC and a senior Congress leader, also took strong exception to the writings/programmes in Sakshi paper and TV channel lately.

If the people of Andhra Pradesh still remember, at one time the late YSR was spewing venom at Eenadu and Andhra Jyothi, both inside the State Legislative Assembly and outside, calling these two news media anti-Congress. He harassed those media houses and their proprietors with many rules and regulations. He never admitted to any corruption alleged in the news stories, related to the Ellampalli project, Outer Ring Road contracts, Obulapuram mining, Brahmani Steels, Bauxite mining in Vizag or Granite Mining at Prakasam District. Nor did he ever accept any of the corruption stories in these two newspapers/TV channels on irrigation projects he had launched, in the name of `Jalayagyam~. These came to be later known as `Dhanayagyam~ and were said to have allegedly benefited thousands of contractors to the tune of thousands of crores. He was accused of channelling benefits from these handouts as initial investment for establishing Sakhi, Brahmani, etc. owned by his son YS Jagan.

YSR used to claim that his was `God~s rule~ (Devuni paalana) due to a number of welfare schemes he launched. Together with the money spinning schemes for his party/party men/contractors, these helped the Congress to virtually consolidate its position in the State for a long time to come.

But, his speculation did not come true in the state elections held in 2009 when his party won barely 156 MLAs (just nine MLAs above the half mark of 146) in the 292 member house of the Legislative Assembly. At the same time the opposition Telugu Desam Party (TDP) headed by Chandrababu Naidu gained a lot with their strength going up from 44 to 96 MLAs. In terms of percent of votes polled, the Congress had only half a per cent more than that that of the opposition Grand Alliance.

Worried over the increased strength of TDP and the decline in its own strength, YSR planned to vertically split the TDP (This was not the author~s guessing. This was revealed on the Sakshi TV channel last month in an interview that was telecast with Lakshmi Parvathi and Devineni Rajasekhar alias Nehru, an MLA from Vijayawada in a live chat on the sets in the studio of Sakshi channel).

YSR also used to state often that Sakshi was started not only to counter Eenadu/ETV and Andhra Jyothi/ABN TV, but also to give full credence and support to the Congress and his popular schemes, besides his irrigation projects. In the process, Sakshi used to target the editors of Eenadu and Andhra Jyothi by caste, besides Chandrababu, day in and day out.

This is the backdrop against which the new canvas of YS Jagan has started unfolding off late.

Jagan~s emergence as an alternative to YSR

Immediately after YSR~s death, the internal equations within the State Congress quickly changed. Even before YSR~s funeral, YSR loyalists proposed that YS Jagan be sworn in as the Chief Minister. But, the Congress high command which had been hitherto bearing with the eccentricities of YSR~s leadership in the State, found the soft Rosaiah as the best alternative to put the State in order after the financial chaos that YSR created with his aggressive Jalayagyam and cheap popular schemes.

But, this decision of the Congress high command has angered YS Jagan, who in turn chose to create pin pricks in the way of Rosaiah~s administration, either through his loyalists or his father~s loyalists. But due to the persistent support of the high command to Rosaiah, Jagan~s supporters in the Congress gradually shifted their loyalties to Rosaiah. Firstly, Rosaiah planned to reshuffle/expand his cabinet for which he got the nod from the high command. Secondly, Jagan~s loyalists suspected that they may be jettisoned if they continued to be loyal to Jagan despite the high command~s clear signal in favour of Rosaiah~s continuance as CM.

At the same time, another group of Telangana legislators who kept a low profile in supporting the Telangana agitation during YSR~s time, took the lead immediately after the demise of YSR. Those who were earlier with Jagan parted ways with him keeping in tune with the sentiments of people of the Telangana region. Joining hands with KCR of TRS party, these Congressmen had driven the state to the brink of chaos and anarchy with KCR embarking on a fast unto death for separate Statehood for Telangana.

In the process, Jagan lost a number of loyalists (some switched over to Rosaiah for cabinet berths, while some sang the separate Telangana tune) who were initially with him when he raised the demand to be appointed heir to the CMs seat.

At this time, Jagan~s supporters found two options open for him to ensure his continued presence in the party: one was to negotiate a deal with Rosaiah and another was to send Jagan on a mission to tour those areas where his father~s admirers were believed to have died of shock upon hearing the news of YSR~s death. Jagan visited Rosaiah first at his camp office and during the course of talks, Jagan was believed to have requested Rosaiah not to drop his men from his cabinet in the reshuffle. Secondly, he informed Rosaiah of his plans to visit the houses of those who died of shock following his father~s death in different districts of Andhra and Telangana.

Sakshi paper and television begins the new strategy

This is the beginning of Sakshi~s u-turn in its strategy towards the Congress. Sakshi channel gave round-the-clock coverage to its owner YS Jagan during his 6 day visit to these four districts of Andhra coastal area and one Telangana district-Khammam. The media hype given by Sakshi channel and TV 5 portrayed Jagan to be of greater stature than he is.

But the high command paid no significant heed to his much hyped visits to the districts of coastal Andhra. This has angered him so much that he began to feel he was cornered or ignored. Meanwhile Rosaiah had reportedly taken an exception to the behaviour of senior Congress Lok Sabha MP Undavalli Aruna Kumar, (who is believed to be a staunch supporter of YS Jagan) who wrote a letter to the chief minister, a copy of which was sent to Sakshi first even before it reached the CM. The letter asked him to take action against Ch. Ramoji Rao of Eenadu for his reported violations in the Margadarsi case.

With loss of many loyalists both from Telangana and coastal Andhra, YS Jagan was left with no option but to turn the way of Eenadu/ETV and Andhra Jyoti/ABN TV channel and attack the ruling party. To do

this, he found in the corruption and inefficiency of the present Congress dispensation, a weapon to strike at Rosaiah~s governance.

To portray Rosaiah as a poor administrator and too inefficient to continue as the CM to govern the State, Jagan has begun to publish stories of corruption and inefficiency even more regularly in his paper, and show them on Sakshi TV channel, in the hope that the high command may one day believe that Rosaiah as CM failed to deliver and should be eventually replaced by none other than YS Jagan himself.

As a collateral strategy, he has also begun to attack Chandrababu and elevate Balakrishna, the son of NTR. Not a single day passes at Sakshi TV channel without it airing a programme involving a discussion on the possibility of Balakrishna becoming the TDP president and the next CM. Capturing Balakrishna~s statements on his future role in TDP, Sakshi channel tries each day to `frame~ his statements out of context by interpolation and extrapolation.

Whatever may be Jagan~s intentions in attacking Rosaiah, the people of the State are very clear as to what is in store for the Congress. Even the Congress high command right now can foresee what is in store for the party in the next elections, with a division of Andhra Pradesh into Andhra or Telangana or without it.

The Congress has never come back to power for a third consecutive term in the post Indira period in any State in India. This historical fact is known to Congress pundits in New Delhi, even if Jagan nurtures dreams of leading the Congress to victory in the 2014 elections. The writing on the wall is clear.

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